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LOGISTICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PANHANDLE OF NORTH VIETNAM

AND LAOS, 18 MARCH TO 1 MAY 1969

Project No. 54.5285

15 May 1969

OSD REVIEW COMPLETED

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Logistical Developments in the Panhandle of  
North Vietnam and Laos,  
18 March to 1 May 1969

Summary

As the dry season nears an end the Communists continue to move substantial quantities of supplies into Laos for support of fighting in South Vietnam. Estimated tonnage for April was 60 percent above the preceding month, though performance during March was abnormally low for this time of year. The total amount of supplies moved into Southern Laos this dry season was probably greater than last year and, as in past seasons, continued to be adequate to meet all requirements of enemy forces in the Panhandle and all four Corps areas in South Vietnam for military supplies from external sources.

Despite a considerably higher level of allied air attacks against supply routes in Laos this season, traffic continued to move most of the time. Throughout the air interdiction campaign the Communists continued to expand their logistical network which, by early April, had been augmented by some 270 miles of new roads and bypasses. A considerable effort has also been directed at improving the all weather capability of the roadnet and a substantial level of logistical activity can be expected during the coming rainy season.

The overall level of logistic activity in the North Vietnamese Panhandle remained about the same as it has been since the bombing halt. The movement of supplies noted on the main roads leading toward Southern Laos continued heavy; little logistical activity was noted on routes immediately north of the DMZ. Coastal shipments, which fell off sharply during March, showed a considerable recovery in April, suggesting that some stockpiles had been diminishing in the southern region of the country.

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North Vietnam

The overall pattern of vehicular traffic in the North Vietnamese Panhandle continued unchanged from that which has been noted since November 1968. Heavy traffic continued to be evident in and around the large storage area at Bai Duc Thon and on Route 15 leading to the Mu Gia Pass.

25X1 [redacted] two large convoys (consisting of 52  
25X1 and 28 trucks) heading south on Route 15 only a few miles from the Laotian  
25X1 border. [redacted] similar convoys  
of 25 and 52 trucks moving into Laos on 10 and 11 April, which probably were  
the same [redacted] Relatively heavy traffic was also noted on  
the roads between Quang Khe and Dong Hoi, and Route 137 leading to the Ban  
Karai Pass. Little logistical activity was noted on routes immediately north  
of the DMZ.

The North Vietnamese continued to improve the logistical system along the western edge of the Demilitarized Zone. Work on two new access routes (1036 and 1038) into Laos was continued as were efforts to improve waterways in the area west of the DMZ. Another route (1032) has been improved and made motorable to the DMZ. At the present rate of construction all three new roads probably will be fully tied into the Laotian road system by the latter part of June. When completed the expanded North Vietnamese logistical network in the Demilitarized Zone area will provide a more direct and much less vulnerable

\* Generally poor weather prevailed over the southern panhandle in North Vietnam during April, however, conditions were improved over previous months and 316 tactical air reconnaissance missions were flown. This compares with 186 missions in March and only 72 in February.

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means of moving supplies in support of enemy forces in Laos and South Vietnam.

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Improvements have been made to the meter gauge rail tramway in southern North Vietnam. Reconstruction of the rail bridge at Thuong Phong Trang now allows through rail service to the transshipment and cave storage area at Cho Phang, which is located about 60 miles north of the DMZ. The main northern loading point in the tramway appears to be the water-to-rail transshipment point at Xam Hoai - located about 25 miles southwest of Vinh, but the rail line does extend further north to Duc Tho where a new water-to-rail transshipment point is under construction. The rail yard at Vinh continues to show a moderate level of activity. The rail bridges at Dien Chau and Tam Da have been fully restored and it now appears that the entire Hanoi - Vinh rail line is serviceable to the regular size meter gauge locomotives. However, none of these larger locomotives have yet been noted south of Thanh Hoa.

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Work has continued on the military petroleum pipeline which currently extends from the Vinh area southwest to a point near Route 15 some 20 miles inside Laos. All of the new construction has taken place on the North Vietnamese section and has consisted mainly of expanding storage sites and installing additional pumping facilities. No new construction or extension of the pipeline has been noted in Laos since mid-March; however, the Laotian section was confirmed as being operational in early April

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Laos

The estimated tonnage of supplies moved into the Laotian Panhandle during April was up by 60 percent over March; however, shipments during both months were below comparable months in 1968. Nevertheless, because of heavier than normal activity during October-February the total tonnage moved in from North Vietnam during the current dry season has probably exceeded that of the preceding dry season

As in previous seasons the Communists have continued to move into Laos sufficient tonnages to provide for all of the requirements of enemy forces in the Panhandle and in all four Corps areas in South Vietnam for military supplies from external sources.\* Moreover,

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\* Communist forces in South Vietnam and Laos also obtain a small amount of food from Cambodia.

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because the military pipeline near Route 15 probably became operational some-time during the first quarter of this year, the proportion of non-POL tonnage entering southern Laos by truck probably has increased in recent months.

a. Access Routes

Truck sightings reported by pilots\* and by ground observers since the middle of March have indicated an increase in enemy truck traffic on the roads south of Mu Gia Pass, the main access route into Laos (see Appendix A, Table 3). Traffic on the northernmost access route through Nape Pass (Route 8) also has increased while the number of trucks coming through the Ban Karai Pass (Route 912/137) has remained at about the same level. Our information on traffic coming into Laos through the new southernmost access routes near the DMZ is sketchy. The roadwatch team on Route 1036 was withdrawn for operational reasons on 20 March.

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[redacted] indicates both this route and, since mid-April, Route 1038 are being used.

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b. Within the Panhandle

Enemy truck movements in the Laotian Panhandle as noted by all sources continue to follow the main routes from North Vietnam through the Panhandle to South Vietnam. According to air sightings, the principal southern exit point of supplies into South Vietnam is through the Route 922 exit into the A Shau Valley.

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\* Pilot sightings of trucks in the Laotian Panhandle increased by about 30 percent during the current dry season; however, such sightings cannot be used as a reliable indicator of the level of traffic because the number of attack sorties this year has been double that of a year ago.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Supplies also have continued to move down through the Panhandle to the tri-border area. In this connection, we have recently re-examined the data available to us on logistic operations in the southern part of the Panhandle. This evidence showed that the enemy's logistic presence in the area continues to be substantial. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] on Routes 96, 165, and 110, for the latter part of April, showed a level of activity in the southern Panhandle only slightly below that of heavily used Route 922.

The Communists have continued to expand and upgrade their logistical network in the Panhandle this dry season, despite being subjected to an intensified air attack effort by the US.\* Some 270 miles of new roads and bypasses had been built by early April. The considerable effort to improve the wet weather capability of the roadnet continues and the enemy can be expected to maintain a high level of logistical activity during the coming rainy season.

\* See Appendix B, for a brief assessment of the results of air attacks on fixed targets in the Laotian Panhandle.

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## APPENDIX A

Table 3

Truck Statistics - Laotian Panhandle  
Daily Averages

	<u>19 March</u> <u>30 April 69</u>	<u>1 Oct 68</u> <u>30 Apr 69</u>	<u>1 Oct 67</u> <u>30 Apr 69</u>
Sighted	321 <u>a/</u>	231	180
Destroyed	33 <u>a/</u>	22	26
Damaged	11 <u>a/</u>	8	3
Attack Sorties Laotian Panhandle <u>b/</u>	393	362	173
<div data-bbox="284 1302 698 1360" style="border: 1px solid black; height: 28px; width: 255px;"></div>			
Total Number of Trucks Sighted in the Panhandle	145	92	113
Southbound Trucks Near Mu Gia Pass	22	22	29
<div data-bbox="284 1522 735 1591" style="border: 1px solid black; height: 33px; width: 278px;"></div>	934	755 <u>c/</u>	NA

a/ Preliminary data.

b/ Armed reconnaissance sorties by US aircraft, including B-52s, against all types of targets.

c/ Data are for the period 30 October 1968 through 30 April 1969.

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APPENDIX B

Results of Air Attacks on Fixed Targets  
in the Laotian Panhandle

Damage inflicted against fixed targets in the Steel Tiger area of the Laotian Panhandle continued at a record level during the month of April. As shown in the tabulation below, the incidence of damage increased 25 percent over both the March total and the monthly average noted since the bombing halt in North Vietnam on 1 November 1968. Damage during the current dry season is about 30 percent greater than that of a year ago. The increased rate of attack, double the rate of the same period last year, primarily accounts for the high level of damage this dry season.

The principle targets attacked continued to be road segments, storage facilities, anti-aircraft sites and truck parks. The reported heavy damage to the roadnet and associated truck parks and storage areas indicates the major effort being expended to impede and interrupt the enemy's continuing heavy logistic flow of supplies into and through Laos. During March and April a significantly greater number of anti-aircraft sites were reported destroyed and damaged (20-40 percent respectively) than in previous months reflecting the increased presence of the enemy's air defense in Laos.

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Fixed Targets Destroyed and Damaged by Armed Reconnaissance  
Attacks in the Steel Tiger Area of the Laotian Panhandle\*

<u>Target</u>	<u>April</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>Monthly Average Since 1 November 1968</u>	<u>67-68 Dry Season Monthly Average Nov 67 - Apr 68</u>
Road Segments	786	734	711	624
Truck Parks	186	231	254	196
Water Crossing Facilities	88	88	81	97
AAA/Auto. Weapons Sites	547	409	344	203
Storage Facilities/Mil. Complexes	491	330	342	188
Bunkers/Structures	313	135	186	173
TOTAL	2411	1927	1918	1482
Armed Reconnaissance Sorties	11,110	11,980	12,060	5760
B-52 Sorties **	710	240	660	210

\* Data compiled from the NMCC Daily Operational Summary.

\*\* Results of B-52 attacks are not reflected in the above incidence of damage table. BDA for B-52 strikes in Laos is limited only to reports of resulting secondary explosions and occasional post-strike photography, both of which are not individually distinct enough for inclusion in the above table.

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